



White milk is an ideal-type or a norm and, as such, it is a product of our fantasy, just as it is a product of industry. Its uniform white colour is achieved by separating all of its constituent molecules, then recombining them in complex formations. Milk comes to us via the supermarket shelf radiant with an even whiteness, glowing through its glass or plastic vessel. Milk is opaque. This solid body of white is about 87% water and 13% solids. If the fat is removed from milk, a bluish tinge results. If there are plentiful riboflavins, it can take on a greenish glow. Some milk, such as that of Guernsey and Jersey cows has carotene in it and appears yellow to the eye. The whiteness of milk might offer itself up as a palette, a canvas on which to test out colouring. Or it might become the body colour. Milk was the matter used for the first paintings – the models of boats and people and furniture exhumed from Tutankhamen's tomb were painted in milk paint, milk mixed with lime and iron oxides and other earth pigments.



Edward Hussey Delaval in his 'Experimental Inquiry Into the Cause of Changes of Colours in Opaque and Coloured Bodies' (1777) used milk coagulated with boiling Oil of Tartar to explore the spectrum of colour. 'It passes', he notes, 'through every gradation of yellow, orange and red as it thickens'. As it dilutes it turns blue. 'Thus', he announces triumphantly, 'from one and the same liquor, the five first colours of Sir Isaac Newton's table are produced in their regular order, in proportion as the component parts are united into larger masses'. Milk provides the proof of Newton's shattered rainbow.

Milk has also been black: *Black milk of morning we drink you at dusktime, we drink you at noontime and dawningtime we drink you at night, we drink and drink**. We drink the milk that glows so white it seems to fizz, extends outside the contours of the vessel holding it, as when Hitchcock placed a light inside the glass of poisoned milk carried upstairs by Cary Grant in *Suspicion*.

* Death Fugue, Paul Celan, 1955